

# Neighborhood Grapevine

City of Milwaukee  
Department of Neighborhood Services  
Mayor Tom Barrett  
Commissioner Art Dahlberg



Mayor Barrett points to an abandoned property that could have been saved if the lenders could have found a way to work with the owners. Now the City is left with the demolition bill.

## **Mayor Barrett focuses media on foreclosure problem**

Mayor Tom Barrett has been working to bring more attention to the problems related to home foreclosure and its impact on Milwaukee neighborhoods. In June he took representatives of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on a tour of foreclosed homes that covered the entire spectrum of the problem.

The first stop was a property that resulted in what the Mayor called, “a lose, lose, lose situation.” The bank would not renegotiate with the owner, the owner walked away. Later, a fire started at the property. When the bank saw the condition of the home they failed to notify the owner of the release of the foreclosure. The owner is nowhere to be found, and the City is stuck with the bill to tear down the burned out building. The building was torn down that day.

This was perhaps the worst example, but unfortunately it is an all too common occurrence.

The next property on the tour list was  
**See Media Tour page 3**

## **State Adopts 2009 IBC Code**

The State of Wisconsin adopted the 2009 version of the International Building Code. It became effective September 1, 2011. To the uninitiated, it is not unusual for the State to adopt a code that is three years old as it takes that amount of time to work through the various oversight committees that may wish to keep some items that are unique to Wisconsin. Such items are called “Wisconsinisms”.

The 2009 IBC is a “base code” and the various states typically make their own code changes dependent on their needs. For example, in the International Mechanical Code (IMC) there is a lengthy math calculation that allows an HVAC designer the option to maximize the number of square feet needed for an assembly occupancy. The “Wisconsinism” is a smaller and quicker method yielding a more “favorable” number for the builder.

One **state code (Ch. 66)** change that may have the most immediate impact on building owners is the requirement to replace battery operated smoke alarms in commercial residential units (3 or more units) with a **non-replaceable 10-year battery smoke alarm**. This impacts older commercial buildings which did NOT require a hardwired system. As battery alarms outlive their expiration date, they will have to be replaced with the new 10-year battery type. The sensors inside all alarms typically wear out after about 10-years. Most have an expiration date stamped inside the alarm.

Significant changes in the **International Fuel Gas Code** include new definitions for equipment and appliances. The definition of “Gas Utilization

**See New Code Changes page 2**

## New Code Changes from page 1

Equipment” was deleted and the definitions of “Appliances” and “Equipment” were revised to be distinct. Relative changes occurred throughout the code to reflect the intended definitions. **Makeup air** now must be provided to any space in which exhaust fans, kitchen hoods and/or clothes dryers are capable of depressurizing the space and interfering with the appliance vents and chimneys. This will have the effect of requiring makeup air for spaces with low air infiltration rates that contain gas-fired appliances of other than the direct-vent type.

Appliances in a garage will no longer have to be elevated if they are in an enclosed isolated space/room that does not open to the garage and all combustion air is taken directly from the exterior of the garage. There are new requirements for adding **gas appliances in parking structures, repair garages, and aircraft hangers**. Attic and crawl spaces will need to be large enough to allow the removal of the largest appliance component. No more piece-meal disassembly in those areas. No more stretching the piping systems to make a gas appliance fit. Section 305.12 **prohibits strains on gas piping**. There are new bonding requirements for Corrugated Stainless Tube piping systems. Lightning strikes have been known to cause fires with flexible tube systems.

Gas Piping can now be run under concrete slabs so long as it is in a conduit. (404.6.2). **Gas shut off valves** can be located on another floor (i.e. basement). Two or more openings into a chimney flue must be off-set or angled 45° to prevent gas from flowing into the opposite vent pipe. Vent off sets now are accumulative and the total length of combined offsets cannot exceed that allowed for a single offset. (504.3.5).

There are **new definitions** in the IBC as well. There is a new “Open Mall Building” definition. Many of the developers are building structures that have a main entrance into one or more open malls. The Covered Mall definition remains. The Interior wall and ceiling finished within the mall and exits shall have a minimum flame spread index and smoke developed index of Class B. **Emergency Responder radio coverage now must be provided**. Another lesson from 9/11 is that radio signals failed inside structures due to the radio frequency absorbing materials used. This applies to both analog and digital signals. In certain high rise occupancies, openable windows shall be used in 50 foot intervals for smoke removal. Also new, buildings more than 420 feet tall will require an additional exit stairway. Another post 9/11 realization is that upbound fire fighting efforts will interfere with downbound exiting. Good news is that the **exit path will now glow in the dark!** It is not unusual to lose the lighting in a big fire. Now the steps and exit path will be marked with luminous path markings. (403.5.5). **Vehicle barriers are now taller** in recognition of the propensity of Americans driving SUVs. The new requirement is 33” minimum. This also addresses the structural loading of these barriers given the added weight. There are new code sections

(419) that deal with Live/work units. Special provisions have been developed to specifically address dwelling units and sleeping units that have a considerable amount of ongoing nonresidential use.

The **definition of a basement has been revised** to indicate that basements are simply those floor levels that do not qualify as stories above grade plane. One major change will make it more easy to identify fire and smoke separation walls. Any of these walls will now be required to be labeled and any penetration through them will require fire stopping and smoke sealing. The 1/2” lettering will be required at 30 foot intervals. That will help a lot for inspections.

Another big impact is the requirement for fire sprinkler systems in Group M furniture stores regardless of the size of the Group M fire area. Mercantile occupancies who sell upholstered furniture will need this requirement. **Many resale shops will have to add the sprinkler systems if they sell furniture.**

Many of the new shaftways and fire equipment rooms have to be identified with signage. This is also spelled out in the International Fire Code (IFC). Areas of refuge are no longer mandated as required elements of accessible means of egress in those buildings equipped throughout with an automatic sprinkler system. (1007.3) In limited occupancy groups, doors that are **electromagnetically locked during building occupancy are now permitted** to be used in the means of egress if equipped with listed hardware that incorporates a built-in switch that meets specified conditions. (1008.1.9.8) In Factory, Hazard and Storage occupancies, open risers with no restriction on size of opening are now permitted at stairways located in areas not accessible to the public.

Are you planning on building a deck? Be careful if you permanently mount a seat or a bench. **Fixed seating adjacent to a guard is now considered a walking surface** and the minimum height of the guard is to be measured from that surface rather than from the floor. (So the guard will have to be higher!) The 8” opening between the open-type rails from 36”- 42” range is gone. That zone now also requires 4 3/8” sphere restriction. (The IRC allows 4”, but stair rails must be 4 3/8”)

The allowance for an extended common path of egress travel in Group R-2 occupancies is now also available in buildings that are protected throughout with an NFPA 13R automatic sprinkler system. The rule acknowledges the added protection from the sprinkler system to increase the travel distance limit from 75 feet to 125 feet.

Factory roof vent systems are no longer allowed. They worked too well! They let the smoke out before the sprinkler system could put the fire out. The travel distance is now shortened from 400’ feet to 250’ with a sprinkler system. **A number of high piled storage fires indicated the interaction between the smoke vents and sprinkler system caused an excessive number of heads to activate** and that additional testing and research are needed if means of increasing egress travel distances is considered. ☹️





DNS Commissioner Art Dahlberg reviews the enforcement record of an abandoned foreclosed property with Ald. Micheal Murphy, Council President Willie Hines and Mayor Tom Barrett as well as members of the Journal-Sentinel editorial board.

### Media Tour from page 1

one that was clearly salvageable, but through mostly neglect is at risk of being beyond repair. The lis pendens has been filed and while currently in the nearly year long process of foreclosure, nothing is being done to seal the windows to keep the snow and rain out, the paint is peeling which accelerates the weathering of the wood, and the boards create a blight next to homes that are in fine condition. This duplex was demolished in September. On some blocks in the City, a clustering of these homes puts the remainder of the neighborhood in peril.

The final stop on the tour was a home in the Sherman Park neighborhood that was bought out of a foreclosure and was being rehabbed. The home was nearing completion and is now occupied. The home required many updates and was restored to respect its original character. It is no longer an eyesore and helps anchor a vital location adjacent to Sherman Park.

DNS continues to monitor the many abandoned and foreclosed homes in the City. As a proactive effort by DNS the Abandoned Property in Foreclosure ordinance was modified to capture the ownership information BEFORE the property goes vacant. The initial 2009 legislation required that banks would monitor their property for abandonment, and unfortunately the majority of the cases went to abandonment before the plaintiff/owners could be contacted. The new requirement is that the bank record their ownership contact information at the point the lis pendens is filed and if vacant, provide the contact for a local operator to maintain the property. This can save months of paper chasing and enable the bank to contact the owner should the foreclosure be dropped. It also engages the banks in the property maintenance role so the department has a “go to” person for matters such as grass cutting and snow shoveling. Between April and October 2011 over 2,300 foreclosures were registered under the new ordinance.

There is a dedicated web page detailing all of the necessary steps a realtor and/or a bank should be aware of when dealing with foreclosed property. The page also aids in the process of checking compliance issues with other City required compliance programs as well as the foreclosure programs.

<http://www.milwaukee.gov/DNS/APIF/BankersChecklist.htm>

People are a critical link in licking the foreclosure problem in Milwaukee. Because people move out without warning, illegal salvage operators can remove 40% of a building’s value overnight. DNS needs to know when a property goes vacant. Early warning signs are the lack of lawn maintenance or snow shoveling, the buildup of mail or door flyers, the lack of window treatments or shades, etc. If you see windows knocked out, doors kicked in, or other signs of forcible entry, call DNS at 414-286-2268 with the address. Your call can prevent further deterioration to the neighborhood and help protect your property value. 🐶



A housing contractor explains the upgrades and work that went into a former foreclosed home in the Sherman Park Area. Mayor Tom Barrett, Ald. Michael Murphy, Council President Willie Hines as well as members of the Journal-Sentinel editorial board toured the refurbished house. City grants made the work possible.

## CODE QUIZ!

A box of standard ordinary copier paper that contains 10 reams of 500 sheets each equals the fire fuel equivalency of how much gasoline?

A) One gallon. B) Two gallons C) 3.5 gallons

If you started a fire in a 20 x 20 foot square room and had a pencil size opening between it and another 20 x 20 foot square room, how long would it take to fill the room with enough smoke that you could no longer see your hand 18” in front of your face?

A) 30 minutes B) 15 minutes C) 3.66 minutes

Answer to both questions is (C). How did you do?

## What's wrong with this picture?...



Oh, the things we see out in the field. Right now scrap metal prices are at record highs. That means people are turning to every method they can to stop tossing away metal and get as much of it as they can to the nearest scrap yard that pays cash.

This fall the suburban odor of leaf burning was wafting its way through the City. One of our inspectors noticed an alley filled with some unusually stinky smoke. He rolled up on the scene to investigate further with camera in hand.

"What are you doing?", the inspector asked. "I'm salvaging copper wires." was the reply. The inspector said that open burning is prohibited in the City. As the picture shows, the man was burning the plastic insulation off of the copper computer wires. He stuffed them into a steel bucket, added gasoline and a bottle of Heet to get the fire going, and voila... bare wires.

What happened next underscored the gravity of the situation. When told to put out the fire, the salvager got a garden hose out and doused the burning gasoline with it. The inspector yelled just as the man began flooding the bucket of burning gas where it could spill next to garages and parked vehicles and travel down the alley. Luckily, the fire went out.

In case you didn't know, oil and water don't mix. Judging from the burn marks on the pavement, this had been going on for some time. A near disaster by someone who trying to make a buck, cuts corners, ignores the law and puts his life and those of his neighbors at risk was averted. Illegal salvaging operations will continue to rise with the price of metals. It will take everyone's attention and diligence to stop the scrappers from threatening our lives and property with get rich quick schemes.

**To report code violations call 414-286-2268 or go to [www.city.milwaukee.gov](http://www.city.milwaukee.gov) and click on E-Notify.** 📧

*Did you know the standard one-foot computer cable tray between walls when fully loaded contains the fuel equivalency of one gallon of gasoline! The plastic jackets of the cables will burn intensely.*



(L-R) Back row are Mary Wilkinson-Church, Chris Buzzell, Jesus Mercado-Sanchez, Harold McDonald, front row Pepita Johnson, Jennifer Anderson, Vincent Cortez, Nathan Cress, and Michael Tonelli.

## Meet the DNS new hires

It's been over a year since our last DNS newsletter, so we have some catching up to do. Here's some background on our 2010-2011 new hires. Some have even moved on to other jobs already.

The first group is the new interns and Neighborhood Improvement Program (NIP) inspectors that were hired.

**Mary Wilkinson-Church** is a new NIP inspector. Mary received her Bachelor's in Architecture (professional) and Masters in Architecture from Andrews University, MI. During that period of time, She spent 8 months abroad in Europe studying Architecture and traditional Urban Planning. She moved to Milwaukee three years ago from Southwest, MI where she worked as an intern and then Project Architect at a small architecture firm. She enjoys art, music, medium format photography and spending time with friends.

**Chris Buzzell** is Construction inspector. He is a new-comer to living in the City of Milwaukee, but has lived in Wisconsin for many years. Chris graduated from UW-Milwaukee with a degree in Architecture. He's lived and worked in the mid-west and on the east coast. He has spent the last 30 years involved in the construction industry with the majority of that time devoted to Systems Building.

**Jesus Mercado-Sanchez** is a new DNS intern. Graduated from Bay View H.S. and is currently attending MATC for an associate degree in Architecture and ultimately will transfer to UW-Milwaukee to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Architecture. He's been active Army for three years, spent a year in Iraq, South Korea, and Ft. Carson, Colorado and is currently in the Army Reserves. He also enjoys boxing, basketball, and going to the gym. He says he's proud of his experiences in the military, but his proudest accomplishment is being the best uncle in the world.

**Harold McDonald** is a DNS intern. Harold is from the Milwaukee area. He's spent many years in the construction and remodeling industries. He enjoys fishing and camping. He has a weakness for peanut M&M's.

**Pepita Johnson** is a new DNS intern. She's a lifelong resident of Milwaukee and is really happy about the

**See New DNS FOLKS on page 5**



## New DNS FOLKS from page 4



(L-R) Back row are Jill Schmus, Tom Frank, Shondra Duncan, front row Rachel Doney, Amy Pawlak,

opportunity to work for DNS. She served in the US Navy during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. In her spare time she really enjoys spending time with her three boys, reading, shopping and traveling.

**Jennifer Anderson** is an intern and went to Riverside University High School here in Milwaukee. She graduated in 2009 from UW-Stevens Point with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. She moved back to enjoy the big city life of Milwaukee. She enjoys watching movies and documentaries on Netflix, going on ridiculously long walks on the East Side and Downtown, and hanging out with her three year old nephew.

**Vincent Cortez** is another intern and graduated from Center For Creative Studies in Detroit, Michigan with a B.F.A. in industrial design. Previous work includes Borders books and music, Gordon Flesh Company and Harley Davidson Motor Company where he was printing posters, creating documents and printing Motor Cycle Titles. In his free time he enjoys going working on his car and going to Road America to race and to watch events at the track.

**Nathan Cress** is a DNS intern. He graduated from high school, Basic Training, Advanced Interval Training, and has a Bachelors Degree from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, D.A.R.E. He's worked a number of jobs, among them; locker room attendant, fry cook, grave digger, Iraq veteran, warehouse manager, tire technician, delivery driver, waiter, Starbucks barista, and apartment manager. His hobbies include cooking, movies, reading, sport shooting, gun collecting, and a host of others. Watch out for his video game skills too!

**Mike Tonelli** is a DNS intern. He's originally from Tampa, Florida, and no, the cold surprisingly does not bother him. He moved to Milwaukee last year for his wife to attend grad school at UWM. He just completed his first marathon in Green Bay and completed it in just under 4 hours.

**Jillian Schmus** is working in the Property Recording Program. She went to Marquette University and is now at UW-Milwaukee finishing up her degree in Professional and Technical Writing. She aspires to be an editor. (Maybe we have a new Grapevine editor!) She previously worked as a bartender, office assistant and lab technician. Jillian is an avid reader and enjoys baseball, volleyball, photography, jewelry making and live music. Jillian grew up out in Oak Creek and



DNS new hires (L to R) Richard Moncher, Jeffery Freitag, Dave Kagel, Kevin Hying, Jesse Crocket, front row Amy Griebnow, Kelly Nieves, Mary Anderson, Kristen Reed, Jonah Molzahn, Susan Steinbach

says she lives on the east side. She has an 8-year-old dog named Dahlia. Jillian loves to travel and would one day like to live in Boston, Ireland, or Italy.

**Tom Frank** grew up in Oshkosh, and graduated from UW-Madison with a degree in Political Science. Prior to starting with DNS, he worked in the construction industry for 23 years as a construction site manager, project manager, and owner of a residential building company. Tom worked for the Social Development Commission as a Neighborhood Improvement Project Coordinator for 1 1/2 years before taking position with DNS as a NIP Inspector.

**Rachel Doney** came from BOZA in 2010 and worked as a DNS cashier. She returned to BOZA in Spring of 2011.

**Shondra Duncan** is a DNS intern. Shondra was born and raised in Milwaukee. She graduated from James Madison High school. She has a bachelors in Criminal justice from Upper Iowa University. She worked in Health Department for 2-years. She was also a seasonal Nuisance Control Officer for DNS. She has a son and daughter in high school. Fun, fun, fun. In her spare time Shondra like to travel, shop, attend sporting events. Her daughter plays tennis and won 3rd place in a state competition.

**Amy Pawlak** is working in the DNS Property Recording Program. Amy joined DNS at the end of May, after working at Captel captioning phone calls for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. She has a BA in English from Alverno College and a MA in English from Mount Mary College. Amy met her husband at Comedy Sportz. See Amy for the full details. She has two sons. When she's not working or spending time with her family, Amy enjoys reading, is a huge fan of the Harry Potter books and films, listening to music, watching movies, improv comedy, and is writing her first full-length novel.

**Richard Moncher** worked as a DNS Nuisance Control officer in 2010 and transfered to work as a parking checker.

**Jeffrey Freitag** is now a Special Enforcement inspector with DNS. He's a long time resident of Milwaukee County and graduated from UW-Milwaukee and worked as a residential architect developing construction documents for new homes. He transfered to the construction trades and worked as a Project manager. As the construction market retreated he went

back to school to study protective services and graduated at the top of his class. He is the past president of the Milwaukee Police auxiliary. He continued his training and is also a certified firefighter and paramedic. He is on the Wisconsin EMS board. He has two children. Now that he's a DNS special inspector he says he's able to blend all this experience into his current job.

**Dave Kagel** is a Residential Code Enforcement Inspector. After graduating from John Marshall H.S. he worked as a rough-neck on an oil rig down south. He liked the 7 days on 7 days off and \$38,000 @ year salary in 1980. The oil bubble bust and he went to work as a Pizza Hut manager, a housing building project manager and as his own home builder. The housing bubble burst and now he's at DNS. Dave is an avid downhill skier who visits Park City once a year and UP snow destinations. He enjoys paintball and motorcycle riding.

**Kevin Hying** is a DNS Nuisance Control Officer. Kevin served in the Marine Corps for four years and has a bachelors degree from UW-Whitewater. Prior to working at DNS he worked at the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF) as a correctional officer. Kevin says he likes hunting and fishing, but enjoys anything to do with the outdoors. That will be a perfect match for a Nuisance Control Officer!

**Jesse Crockett** is a Nuisance Control Officer. He says he enjoys the opportunity to serve his community. He has a BA degree in Business Administration from Prairie View A&M University and in his spare time he's usually volunteering or fishing.

**Amy Griebenow** has been working for the City of Milwaukee for 12 years. This year is lucky number 13. She has an Associates in Applied Arts Degree (Commercial Art/Graphic Design) from MATC. In her free time she likes to travel to any destination with a beach. That may conflict with her other favorite hobbies of fresh flowers and growing house plants. Know of any good plant sitters?

**Kelly Nieves** is the operator answering all the calls about two new and very complex programs in DNS, those being the Residential Rental Inspection program and the Vacant Building Registration Program. Kelly brings 17 years of keeping things in order as she worked at the Milwaukee Public Library. She is pursuing a degree in Business Administration at MATC now and hoping to finish up at Cardinal Stritch College. In her free time Kelly likes to spend time with her family and friends, travel and volunteer.

**Mary Anderson** is a new Nuisance Control Officer with DNS. Note: We now have four Andersons in the department so make sure you label your mail correctly! Mary graduated from UW-Milwaukee with a B.S. in environmental sciences. In her free time she enjoys knitting, crocheting, gardening, cooking, baking, working out, going out to eat, going to brewers games, scotch tastings and playing with her dog Ruby. One Fun Fact is that the first truck she ever drove was her city vehicle.

**Kristen Reed** is a new Nuisance Control Officer with DNS. She earned a degree in Business from Bryant & Stratton

in 2010. Kristen is a life-long Milwaukee resident with a brief stint in New Berlin and Waukesha. On her list of things to do with her free time are camping, travel, cooking & baking, kickball and "any silliness involving my husband and two children."

**Jonah L. Molzahn** is a new residential Code Enforcement inspector. He's originally from Onalaska, WI. Jonah comes from a family deeply involved in the construction industry, especially building safety. He attended UW-LaCrosse, then spent 5 years working in commercial and residential construction in Madison. In 2005, he switched over to residential and commercial building inspection and plan review. His free-time hobbies include restoring wood boats, fishing, boating on the lake and the Mississippi River, taking care of dogs, music, and of course, the Green Bay Packers. Jonah says he's very proud to work for the city and carry on the family tradition here in Milwaukee.

**Sue Steinbach** was originally hired as a Nuisance Control Officer and is now one of the staff taking in complaints and other calls from the public. A native of Wisconsin, Sue graduated from UW-Madison. She joined the Army to see the world. Sue was stationed in Germany for three years and spent many of her free weekends traveling around Europe. She has been in Milwaukee for the last 20 years working in the animal care field. Sue owned a dog boarding and grooming facility and recently owned a doggy day care. She worked at Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission (MADACC) for two years and now spends most of her free time working with local dog and cat rescue groups finding homes for stray animals.

**Remus Guillermo** is a new elevator inspector. Remus



New hires at ZMB, (L-R) Remus Guillermo, Joseph Glorioso, Mark Caldwell, and Dave Alessi.

used to work for an elevator contractor for Schindler Elevator. He was born in the Philippines and moved to Milwaukee when he was 13 yrs. old. Married with three kids two sons and a daughter whom he says is ranked high in tennis. For fun, guess what he like to do...yes, tennis. The family enjoys going to the lake front for a day of picnicking and bike riding in the summer. He used to live on the eastside and knows the area well.



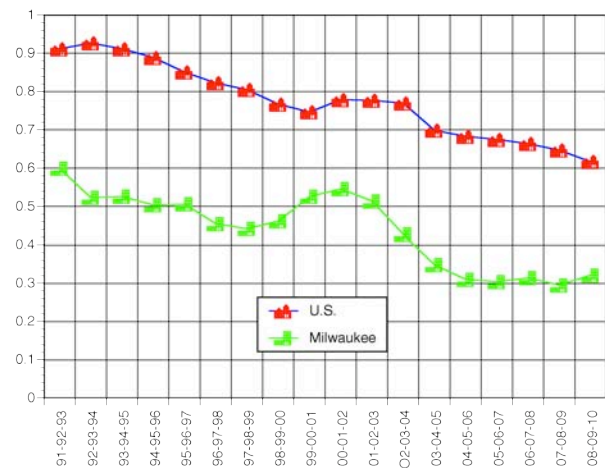
**Joseph Glorioso** is a new electrical inspector for DNS. Joe is a Milwaukee native, and has been in the Electrical Trades since 1992. He has a daughter, (Fiona), and has been married 9-years to his beautiful wife Keely. His hobbies are antiques, Ebay, and working on his 1938 Talbot Lago automobile.

Ever wonder how all those mountains of data get mixed in with maps to make sense of what's happening in the DNS enforcement arena? That's what **Mark Caldwell** is doing for the department. He's a graduate intern for DNS and recently received his master's in Sociology and Geographic Information Systems from UWM. He's continuing this semester for his PhD in Sociology. Mark's research background involves racial politics, geographic food distribution networks and global media. He's married and has two young children, Corbeau and Corinne, who keep him occupied at all times with their constant energy. When the free times arises, he likes to take bike trips, read stuffy sociological texts, and listen to Afro-Funk or old reggae. His interest in social issues combined with geography skills allows him to take advantage of his position within the DNS to generate maps and collaborate on projects relevant to community issues.

**Dave Alessi** is a new DNS electrical inspector. His past employment includes Allen Bradley Company, U.S. Navy, Hotpoint Corporation, IBEW L494 electrical apprenticeship and journeyman, inspector for city of West Allis (22 years), project manager for Miller Electric. He was a temporary employee for City of Milwaukee and now a permanent hire for the electrical inspector position. In Dave's free time, he enjoys camping, motorcycle trips and six grand children.

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The winner of the annual St. Patty's Day Girl Scout Cookie eating contest was **Marge Piwaron**. She correctly got the four years worth of Chocolate Mint Cookies in the right order. Her reward for the tasty effort is a free lunch at South Shore Yacht Club. Runners-up Pepita Johnson and Jesus Mercado-Sanchez and Diane Koester each won a box of Lemonades 2011 vintage! Support your local girl scouts! 🍪

**Commercial Fires Per 1000 Population 3 Year Average**



\*NFPA and MFD data DNS TNW V1 9/12/11 V1

## **Milwaukee Commercial Fire Rate Beats National Average...Again**

The October numbers are in from the National Fire Protection Association and Milwaukee Fire Department for 2010 fires. Comparing the number and type of fires that occur in Commercial buildings, the type that DNS inspects annually, Milwaukee continues to beat the national average. In fact it has done so consistently for the past several years as the chart above indicates. It beat the national rate by 32%.

What this means is that business in Milwaukee are safer than those around the rest of the country. The reasons may be many, no forest fires, no earth quakes or flooding disasters that spark fires in commercial buildings.

It also means that the triad of plan exam, inspections and fire response are able to hold the line when it comes to fires in the market place. Tragically the fire codes we have today are the result of some death and/or disaster that has led us to reconsider how we do things. We know we can do better and each generation is charged with the responsibility to make our world a safer and more prosperous place.

Not having to lose lives and property to fire are one of the great financial advantages of a proactive future that makes Milwaukee a better choice to do business in. 🍪

## **What's going on at Zeidler Municipal Building?**

One of the State requirements of an annual building fire inspection is to test the sensitivity of a smoke alarm. The radioactive or photoelectric sensor can become inoperative without warning. Hence the periodic test is required. This test requires covering the detector with a cup and injecting a smoke agent to trigger a response.

The operator of the smoke dispenser is in contact with the system monitor at the alarm panel making sure each detector is working. The majority of fire fatalities are from SMOKE, not fire. Did you remember to change your smoke and carbon monoxide alarm batteries when you set your clocks back this past fall? Remember... Dead batteries KILL! 🍪



## **2011 a year to remember what fire codes are all about**

### **ARE FIRE INSPECTIONS IMPORTANT ?**

By Jeffrey Freitag (DNS Special Inspector)

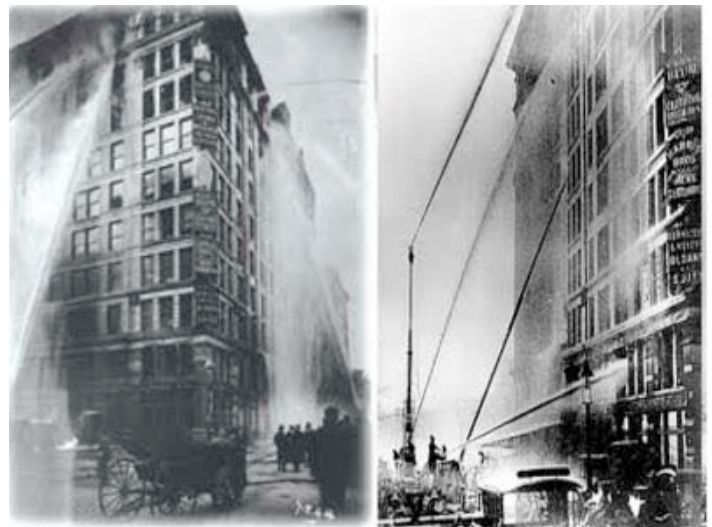
The other evening at a community meeting I was with some of the property owners and residents of the City of Milwaukee discussing smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, and basic fire prevention. I was trying to explain the roles that property owners, residents, and inspectors have in the success of fire prevention. I was asked; "Why are fire inspections so important? Does anyone really care?" I stepped back for a moment to gather my thoughts and meet this challenge placed before me. I tried to provide a complete explanation on the importance of fire inspections and why we care.

We live in a society and culture that celebrates special events and occasion for various reasons. There are numerous annual observances and celebrations we enjoy such as New Years, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. However, there are a few events we observe which are not as enjoyable and leave a life altering impression. Some people have experienced these historic events now observed with a day of remembrance or moment of silence. A few of these observances include the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the assassination of JFK, the space shuttle Challenger disaster, the 9/11 attacks on America, and most recently the BP Oil Rig explosion in the Gulf. These events have been investigated in attempts to identify preventable hazards, clarify mistakes, and develop improvements to current life safety measures. Many of the advancements in life safety were brought about by a tragic event or experience paid by the ultimate sacrifice of others. The observance of such tragic events are intended to show respect for the loss of life, celebrate the life of survivors, and serve as a reminder of the responsibility we all share in society.

One hundred years ago, on March 25, 1911, there was a most tragic event which has been the largest fire death toll in New York until September 11, 2001. The Triangle Waist Company, occupied the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors of the Asch Building in lower Manhattan, manufacturing ten to twelve thousand ladies' blouses each week. The Triangle Waist Company employed approximately 275 factory personnel, mostly women. It was here on the upper three floors where just before quitting time at 4:45 P.M., when the fire broke out. The fire was believed to have started from a discarded cigarette or match carelessly tossed into a bin containing cotton material and paper scraps. The fire consumed the combustible materials rapidly, charging the eighth floor with heavy black smoke and intensely hot flames.

Without a fire alarm system installed in the building, combined with increasing panic and confusion, the factory workers were delayed in reporting the fire to the Fire Department. The fire spread rapidly across the eighth floor and quickly jumped up to the ninth and tenth floors, where other workers remained unaware of the growing hazard. The sound of the responding fire engines and the word of terror spread rapidly across New York's East Side. Once alerted, the New York City Fire Department responded in due course and was able to extinguish the fire, approximately thirty minutes from the time of ignition.

Despite the heroic efforts of bystanders and many highly trained individuals, 146 factory personnel tragically died in those thirty minutes. The investigation revealed that many of the female victims were in groups. Several victims were found dead from smoke inhalation at the blocked emergency exits and two unusable stairwells from the upper floors. Other victims were recovered burned to death on the three fire floors. However tragic these deaths are, the greatest impact engaging organizations and the government to ultimately develop and implement a universal change, were witnessed by the horrified firemen, policemen, and thousands of on lookers.



All stood by helplessly on the street as what initially appeared to be bolts of cloth, some fully engulfed in fire, were falling from the upper floors of the building. It was quickly revealed the falling objects obstructing the response of the Fire Department, and to the shock of all, were actually women hurdling themselves to their death onto the paved street below. Visible one hundred feet above were silhouettes of women, ages 13 to 23 standing on windows ledges with no chance of rescue. Some women jumped off the ledges in attempts to escape a more ghastly and agonizing death of being consumed by flames. Still other women already on fire, or who were overcome by the suffocating smoke, plunged to their death from the upper floors. A few women were observed in failed attempts to reach the safety of the fire ladders which only extended up to the sixth floor. The workers reaching the single exterior fire escape fell to their deaths when the poorly



maintained structure released from the building and collapsed to the street below. Finally, the two freight elevators used for the rescue of many survivors were rendered inoperable from the additional weight of the bodies falling down the elevator shaft in attempts to escape the fire.

The official investigation of the events of this catastrophic fire, which remains the fourth deadliest fire in United States history, determined that there were a number of correctable conditions that would have saved lives. To only itemize a few, there were an inappropriate number of exits and stairwells for the occupancy of the floors. Means of egress were blocked by fixtures, some exits with inward swinging doors, and other exit doors were found locked. The company provided no education nor practiced evacuation drills with the employees. The building was without a working fire sprinkler system or fire extinguishers, and the occupants were provided 27 buckets of water to be use in case of fire. All of these existing conditions could have been identified and corrected through completing a standard fire inspection. However, without government regulation of fire prevention and inspection, the times placed more of an emphasis on fire extinguishment and suppression.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911, although a distant tragedy, is still relevant and current today as the genesis of fire prevention and government regulation. This preventable tragedy transformed government's involvement from a reactionary to a proactive role. In response to this disaster, the American Society of Safety Engineers was founded in New York City in October 1911. This organization is the oldest safety society, promoting and consulting for all industries on the safety and protection of individuals, property, and environment. The New York State Legislature then passed legislation establishing an Investigation Committee to identify more hazardous and unsanitary conditions. It was soon identified by the Fire Chief that more than 200 factories had the same conditions and construction which needlessly endangered the lives at the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. The New York State Legislature passed comprehensive legislation to develop tools for fire prevention and enforcement agencies to implement universal life safety and fire prevention guidelines. In response to these changes, the National Fire Protection Association established in 1897, followed suit by developing the Life Safety Code - NFPA 101. This standard advocated for the reduction of fire related hazards on the quality of life through scientific based research. Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) from states, counties, and municipalities all across the United States quickly adopted the standards to advance the education, identification, and elimination of all hazards. Hazards included life safety risks in new construction and existing buildings; occupations and trades; including industrial, mercantile, institutional, and residential properties.

However, the practice of enacting safety legislation and the development of standards will not prevent hazards or increase the life safety of anyone. Throughout much of America's history, industry and government have developed

new and specialized equipment, processes, and legislation. History has shown only through the responsible efforts of individuals are any advancements able to affect a positive change in the lives of many. Only through the collective efforts of qualified fire inspectors, owners and others can real fire prevention be more widely accepted and employed. The Code Enforcement Officer utilizes effective means of communication to identify hazards and increase the life safety of others and the emergency responders. Fire inspections are important by providing an even greater impact on the life safety of the general public and emergency responders who entrust their lives to our professional work product. 🍷

## **Milwaukee History Test... Think you know what's up?**

One of the first innovations after the arrival of the high-rise building was the invention that made hire rise buildings possible... the elevator and escalator. Here's a little test to see if you can remember when they popped up in Milwaukee.

1. Name the Company and Location of Milwaukee's first Elevator. (Hint: it was NOT a retail store!)
2. Put the following locations of escalators in the right order of appearance.  
A - Mitchell Field, 5300 S. Howell Ave.  
B - Schusters, 2153 N. 3rd St.  
C - Boston Store  
D - Gimbel's, 101 W. Wisconsin Ave.  
E - South gate, 3333 S. 27th St.
3. Name the first amusement ride location in Milwaukee. (See answers below)

1. Milwaukee's location in the heart of farm land and leather. Hence the first elevator was installed at 647 W. Virginia. The business was Pfister & Vogel. There is no date on the record, but the first elevator code was established in 1912 so that is the likely date.

2. Early shoppers marveled at the luxury we take for granted, the ability to climb stairs without walking. The first store to offer free "rides" to shop was Gimbel's, followed by Southgate, then Schusters, then Mitchell Field followed by Boston Store.

3. If you ever were lucky enough to be a kid and know the fun you have for \$2 all night to ride any of a dozen amusement rides that included the Wild Mouse roller coaster, then you know that Funtown, at 5500 W. Capitol Dr. in the corner of Capitol Court shopping Center was the place to be. Soon to follow was M.C. Johnson at 7350 N. 76th St. which had the best go-cart track. Finally, the Milwaukee Zoo got on board with their train ride around the animal Kingdom. Now mega-resorts and water theme parks are the new standard. So much for the old home-spun fun. DNS still inspects escalators and elevators on an annual safety inspection. Amusement rides are now done by the State of Wisconsin. 🍷



## COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

by Commissioner Art Dahlberg

Soon we begin that time of the year when reflect on what we have done with our lives over the past year and think about things that we, could have, would have and should have done for the year that has past.

DNS is no exception as we think about the many things we do and how we do them. Each year brings new challenges, but also arms us with more experience to do the old things in a quicker, easier, and hopefully better way.

Take for example this past years vacant building data that showed that 83% of these buildings had violations cited, thus proving the point that vacant buildings are a source of blight in our neighborhoods. To that end over 30,000 inspections were done this year on these buildings to control these impacts. Over 300 vacant and blighted properties have been removed from the neighborhoods through demolition. Tight collaboration with the police department has resulted in attacking the stripping of homes, squatter activity and other illegal behavior.

It has been through these efforts to enforce the codes and regulations to prevent Milwaukee's housing stock from deteriorating that people in the field, given the knowledge to do their job and working together with other agencies succeeded to bring an immediate change to problems that had been languishing without action. It was a greater impact than what could have come from months of individual effort to make a change.

Virtually every organizational management guru says the key to avoiding problems is to go up stream and fix the problem before it grows larger. So is the case with the department's approach to home foreclosures. The property in foreclosure ordinance started years ago, yet more and more homes where falling into disrepair. Sure, the numbers were part of the equation, but something more needed to be done.

Looking at the foreclosure process DNS first thought banks would monitor their assets to protect them. After all, once an owner moves out, chances are high in some neighborhoods, that illegal scrappers will strip a home 40-50% of its value overnight. Once the home value drops, it easily becomes prohibitively expensive to repair and people walk away.

Moving up stream in this process can change that outcome. The new law requires lenders to register their property with DNS the moment the lis pendens or court filing is made. This gives DNS valuable information about who is taking care of the property during the foreclosure process. While not a silver bullet, it certainly is something DNS should have done earlier.

The foreclosure problem is one of many issues DNS deals with. Since we are a complaint based system, one of most valuable commodities are vigilant citizens who care enough about their neighborhood that they pick up the phone and call us to alert us about a problem. Everything counts on private property, garbage, too many cars, holes in windows, vacant buildings, and the list goes on.

Wouldn't it be nice to make one call and bring the entire focus of all the City departments to bear on your problem? One such wish is in the planning stages.

Looking forward to improved customer service may be one of the big benefits of going to a unified call center and the ability to triage citizen complaints and deploy all the right resources to

address the problem. Additionally, technology will help drive improvements such as allowing citizens to send pictures of their concerns through their smart phones.

In the past year we have seen the creation of a new division within the department. The special enforcement division brought together a number of programs throughout the department and created a coordinated tool working hand in hand with the police department to attack the chronic problem of buildings and behavioral issues in the neighborhood. This is our investment in the larger community prosecution model.

Significant work has been done to reorganize the residential code enforcement and nuisance control functions in the department. Significant training is occurring on the creation of a "hybrid" inspector who will have the knowledge and ability to deal with the "entire" problem, instead of piece meal enforcement. When a caller calls with a complaint, it is rarely just one item that motivated them to call. Typically, it's a host of issues. A broken window usually has peeling paint, rotten wood, and other signs of neglect like garbage in the yard and people parking on the lawn. This would have taken two inspections by two different sections to resolve with orders.

The hybrid inspector will have jurisdiction over all of the building code and environmental laws on that property. Furthermore, the resources of the special enforcement team will be available to support the district inspector when needed. Through this organization the inspectors will have a smaller territory that they will get to know and work with the local police and neighborhood groups. This pairing will bring hopefully some of the same synergy success that was demonstrated with the creation of the special enforcement division.

A multi-agency work group has been formed to review the city's land management needs. Proposals are being drafted for a "unified" software product that will enable all departments to share information rapidly and accurately. Sort of a "medical record" history from the first plan exam permit, construction inspection, occupancy inspection and any enforcement action will be accessed. Parts of the system will be readily available to the public to utilize.

In the future perhaps one can e-mail a photo of a problem and the software will know the address, the enforcement history and ownership contact information. A fire inspector will know what the previous violations were. An inspector of an abandoned building can order the boarding of a building at the push of a button instead of a paper delay.

Of course all of the accomplishments mentioned above could not have been done with the cooperation and dedication of great DNS staff. I would like to thank everyone for the hard work throughout the past year.

All these things are items we hope the future will move us past, would have, could have, and should have. That will be a better year in Milwaukee.

### DNS How to reach us



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Have a contribution for the next edition of the  
DNS GRAPEVINE? Deadline March 15, 2012  
Email it to Todd Weiler, Editor: [tweiler@milwaukee.gov](mailto:tweiler@milwaukee.gov)